

(323) 881-2401

January 24, 2003

TO: EACH SUPERVISOR

FROM: FIRE CHIEF P. MICHAEL FREEMAN

**FOLLOW UP – MEASURE B FUNDING FOR FIRE DEPARTMENT
HELICOPTER COMMITMENT TO TRAUMA CARE**

On December 4, 2002, I presented a request for Measure B funds for the Fire Department. Since then, I have met with you and your staff and discussed our needs with the Department of Health Services. A copy of that request is attached for your review.

Based on subsequent feedback and questions received, we have gathered more information about the Fire Department helicopter commitment to trauma care and emergency medical services. Since this information further justifies Fire Department qualification for Measure B funding, I desire to share it with you.

Fire Department Commitment to Trauma Care

Since the mid-80's, the number of trauma hospitals in Los Angeles County has dropped from 23 to 13. Today, there is no trauma hospital in the Antelope Valley, Santa Clarita or San Gabriel Valley. Still, medical experience shows that life or death for trauma patients depends greatly on arrival at a trauma hospital within the first "golden hour".

Accomplishment of this arrival goal is impossible without a helicopter flight for trauma patients in these areas of the County. Further, trauma patients in other geographical areas may require helicopter transport because of traffic congestion and/or trauma hospital saturation.

Clearly, Fire Department trauma helicopters are an integral component of Los Angeles County's trauma system. Since 1987, Fire Department helicopter EMS responses have increased by 146% and flight hours have nearly doubled. These increases in flight time and usage significantly impact the Department budget. First, there are flight hour direct costs. Second, there are costs of wear and tear on the helicopters and rising maintenance costs associated with an aging fleet and increased usage.

Given this increased usage, required maintenance hours have increased by 237% over the past ten years, while maintenance staff has only grown from six to ten mechanics. Although the number of helicopters in the fleet has been downsized from eight to seven helicopters, current maintenance staff cannot keep pace with spiraling maintenance demands.

Additional Fire Department Needs

In addition to our request for helicopter funding, our December 4, 2002, request also included the following:

- Paramedic staffing for Antelope Valley and growth areas (\$1.9 million)

This funding will provide for a needed vehicle, equipment, and additional paramedic staff.

- Hazardous materials squad for Antelope Valley (\$2.1 million)

This funding will provide staffing for an additional hazardous materials squad for the Antelope Valley to provide faster response times for this specialized service.

- Terrorism Early Warning Group (\$0.3 million)

This funding will provide permanent staffing for the County's Terrorism Early Warning Group (TEW)

Conclusion

Without the Fire Department provision for trauma helicopter service, the Antelope Valley, Santa Clarita and San Gabriel Valleys would have no trauma service that meets the “golden hour” standard. Other areas of the County that rely on Fire Department helicopters for time critical trauma transport when nearby trauma centers are full would also be lacking without this helicopter service. The annual Measure B funding requested - \$2.5 million for current service and \$4.2 million for an additional helicopter and support service – would be far less costly than what would be required to establish even one new trauma center.

Therefore, I respectfully reiterate the importance of your favorable consideration of our request for Measure B funds for trauma helicopter service, and other needs identified in our request. This funding will assure a continuation of current service and make a modest, but essential increase in the Fire Department helicopter fleet that will better fulfill increased demand, and provide other additional staffing.

This request is totally consistent with Measure B ballot intentions and contributes a cost-effective use of just a small portion of these funds.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (323) 881-2401.
PMF:ji

Attachment

c: David Janssen
Thomas Garthwaite
Louisa Ollague
Randi Tahara
Joseph Charney
Matt Knabe
Jennifer Plaisted

(323) 881-2401

December 4, 2002

TO: THE HONORABLE ZEV YAROSLAVSKY
CHAIR, BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

FROM: P. MICHAEL FREEMAN

MEASURE B FUNDING FOR FIRE DEPARTMENT

The recent passage of Measure B provides funding for critical prehospital trauma care and transport and terrorism preparedness. For more than a decade, the Los Angeles County Fire Department, using Special District funds, has filled gaps in trauma care by staffing two paramedic trauma helicopters. Also, attempts to capture reimbursement funding for the Fire Department have been unsuccessful for a variety of reasons.

Therefore, it is requested that \$11 million of Measure B funds be allocated to the Fire Department in 2003-04 and every year thereafter. As explained below, these funds will be used for prehospital trauma care and transport and anti-terrorism operations. These needs are consistent with the provisions of Measure B and ballot arguments presented to the voters.

PRE-HOSPITAL PARAMEDIC TRANSPORT AND TREATMENT

With the decline of the trauma center system in the County, the Fire Department's paramedic trauma helicopters are stretched beyond their capacity. To fund current trauma paramedic helicopters and the expansion of this service, the following is requested:

Annual Amount
(Millions)

1. Funding for Current Nighttime Paramedic Trauma Helicopter \$2.5

Currently, two paramedic trauma helicopters are staffed during nighttime hours for trauma patient transport. These two helicopters serve the entire County. The requested funding will provide for the following:

- One half of the annual cost of paramedics, pilots and mechanics staffed to support two paramedic trauma helicopters.
- One half of the operating cost of the above helicopters.

With this funding, voter-approved allocation of trauma costs will be funded by Measure B rather than the Fire District, and improved nighttime paramedic trauma helicopter response times will result.

2. 24-hour Paramedic Trauma Helicopter for Antelope Valley \$4.2

Currently, a paramedic trauma helicopter can only be stationed in Antelope Valley during nighttime hours because of other demands for the helicopter during daylight hours. The requested funding would provide for the following:

- Acquisition, maintenance, and other support costs for an additional Firehawk helicopter which would enable us to provide 24-hour Antelope Valley service.
- Paramedics, pilots, and a mechanic to staff and support this helicopter.

With this additional helicopter, air squad services to the Antelope Valley will improve. This is particularly needed in that there is no trauma hospital in the Antelope Valley and no trauma hospital in future plans.

3. Paramedic Staffing for Antelope Valley and Growth Areas \$1.9

Currently, the absence of a trauma center in Antelope Valley and long delays at hospitals have strained current paramedic service levels in the Valley. This funding will provide:

- Needed vehicle for additional paramedic squad and necessary equipment for other paramedic units.
- Required paramedic staffing for the above paramedic squad and other units.

TERRORISM RESPONSE

With the increased threat of terrorism, additional staffing is needed as follows:

1. Hazardous Materials Squad for Antelope Valley \$2.1

Hazardous materials (Haz Mat) squads (1 Fire Captain, 4 Firefighters and a large, specialized vehicle) are among the first responders to a terrorism incident. Currently, the closest Haz Mat squad is located in the Santa Clarita Valley, and the Antelope Valley, which is one-third of the County area, does not have a dedicated unit. In cooperation with the City of Lancaster, we have identified City bond proceeds to fund the required vehicle. The funding requested from Measure B will pay for the five post positions needed to staff this unit.

2. Terrorism Early Warning Group \$0.3

Since the inception of the County's Terrorism Early Warning (TEW) Group, the Department has provided limited staffing by diverting existing staff. To provide permanent funding for this critical staffing need, we are requesting Measure B funding for two Fire Captain positions to permanently staff the TEW.

This funding request represents an ongoing annual requirement that will need to be adjusted annually based on cost increases impacting these units.

The Honorable Zev Yaroslavsky
December 4, 2002
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We are submitting our request now to ensure that Fire Department needs are before you for consideration when Measure B funding is allocated. We will be working with the Chief Administrative Officer, the Director of Health Services and your respective staffs regarding our request, which we believe is consistent with the provisions and intent of Measure B. If approved, this emergency staffing and equipment will meet pressing needs in the Fire Department caused by the decline of the Countywide trauma center network and the challenge of responding to future terrorist attacks.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. Please call me if you have any questions.

PMF:at

c: Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Antonovich
David E. Janssen, Chief Administrative Officer
Thomas Garthwaite, Director of Health Services